



November 18, 2014

Alexandria, VA – Seven national organizations, representing rural school districts, educational service agencies, communities and educators across the country, issued the following statement of support for Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Thomas Wheeler’s recent proposal to raise the E-Rate funding cap by \$1.5 billion.

“We thank Chairman Wheeler for his continued support of the E-Rate program. Following the July 2014 programmatic changes to the E-Rate program, today’s announcement is an excellent complement to the E-Rate modernization effort. The additional funding is a critical component of ensuring the E-Rate program’s sustainability and the ability of our schools and libraries to meet their ever-growing connectivity demands.”

“We are deeply committed to ensuring that our nation’s rural communities have access to broadband connectivity that is comparable to that of their urban and suburban counterparts. Our schools and libraries have increasing demand for broadband connectivity, with schools incorporating ever more connectivity-based applications and devices into their curriculum and teaching, and libraries serving patrons accessing multiple devices at the same time.”

“We are concerned that 64% of our nation’s public schools—serving more than 40 million students, disproportionately located in our rural schools—don’t have broadband connections to the building capable of taking advantage of modern digital learning. Schools across the geographic and socioeconomic spectrums, especially rural schools, have serious work to do to not only achieve long-term internet targets, but to also close critical connectivity gaps that persist in rural and low-income areas. We applaud the FCC’s proposal and the role it plays in bolstering both of these tasks.”

“To date, the FCC’s efforts on E-Rate modernization have focused on closing access and affordability gaps within the program, with careful attention to the unique challenges of connecting rural communities. The permanent infusion of additional funding is a strong step towards closing these gaps. The FCC has estimated that over 40% of rural schools lack access to high speed connections, and the record is clear that bringing these schools up to speed is a costly endeavor, something that will remain unattainable without additional support from the E-Rate program. We sincerely thank Chairman Wheeler and the FCC for their support.”

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